

## The Price of Admission

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Edited by Neal Wyatt -- *Library Journal*

The long wait for the thick envelope, the hope of early admission, the obsessive creation of lists of top choices and safety schools—these are rites of passage for many students. The complicated and mysterious process of getting into a top-ranked school has sparked the imaginations of fiction and nonfiction authors alike, and their books can go far beyond how-to guides and offer a new way to look at the admissions game.

Jean Hanff Korelitz's **ADMISSION** (Grand Central. 2010. ISBN 978-0-446-54071-1. pap. \$14.99) tells the story of Portia Nathan, Princeton admissions officer and well-heeled, self-contained Dartmouth graduate. Grounded in the philosophical debate over admissions work, the novel begins with Portia's recruitment visits to various high schools and runs through a difficult season for Portia both personally and professionally, when her past intersects with her duties and calls her whole life into question.

*New York Times* reporter Jacques Steinberg cracks open the secrets of Wesleyan University's admissions office in **THE GATEKEEPERS: INSIDE THE ADMISSIONS PROCESS OF A PREMIER COLLEGE** (Penguin. 2003. ISBN 978-0-14-200308-4. pap. \$16). The Connecticut liberal arts school allowed Steinberg full access, changing names and identifying details to ensure confidentiality but letting him fully document a year of the admissions process, including a few nail-biting scenes illustrating the final verdict on individual applicants and their ultimate decisions.

Joie Jager-Hyman, a former admissions officer at an Ivy League school, puts faces to the names on admissions files. **FAT ENVELOPE FRENZY: ONE YEAR, FIVE PROMISING STUDENTS, AND THE PURSUIT OF THE IVY LEAGUE PRIZE** (HarperPaperbacks: HarperCollins. 2008. ISBN 978-0-06-125716-2. pap. \$14.95) follows a select group of students from the start of their applications to Harvard and through the final decisions. Immensely readable and a surprising page-turner, this compelling work makes it hard not to flip to the final pages of the book immediately, just to see where the handful of hopefuls ends up. (Hint: It's not where most of them think they're headed at the beginning of the book.)

Another behind-the-scenes nonfiction title written by a former admissions officer, **ADMISSIONS CONFIDENTIAL: AN INSIDER'S ACCOUNT OF THE ELITE COLLEGE SELECTION PROCESS** (Griffin: St. Martin's. 2002. ISBN 978-0-312-30235-1. pap. \$14.95) explores the inner workings of Duke University. Explaining the daily routine of her former job, Rachel Toor takes a critical look at the role of the admissions process in higher education and recommends that the selection operation become "deprofessionalized."

College competition turns deadly in **DANGEROUS ADMISSIONS** (Avon A: Avon. 2007. ISBN 978-0-06-124086-7. pap. \$13.95), a light-hearted mystery that explores the dark side of an elite prep school's frantic preparation for its students' college applications. Jane O'Connor's heroine, semi-unemployed copy editor Rannie Bookman, winds up playing amateur detective after her son Nate's guidance counselor is found dead in his office and Nate becomes a prime suspect in the murder.

The main characters in **ACCEPTANCE** (Picador. 2008. ISBN 978-0-312-42696-5. pap. \$15) are stuck in the throes of the admissions tangle during their senior year at a tony public high school in suburban Maryland. Susan Coll softens her satire with a measure of compassion for the stressed-out students—including one nicknamed "AP Harry," who will accept nothing less than Harvard but whose mother is trying to broaden his horizons—and the parents, whose anxiety and conflicting desires make for compelling storytelling.

**THE CHOSEN: THE HIDDEN HISTORY OF ADMISSION AND EXCLUSION AT HARVARD, YALE, AND**

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**PRINCETON** (Mariner: Houghton Harcourt. 2006. ISBN 978-0-618-77355-8. pap. \$16.95) takes a serious, academic look at the history of the college admissions process. Jerome Karabel posits that this "is also the tale of the maintenance of a social order characterized by vast inequalities of wealth and power," an argument supported with specific examples, archival photographs, and enough research to fill a tome.

Finally, college isn't quite at the center of Jeremy Iversen's **HIGH SCHOOL CONFIDENTIAL: SECRETS OF AN UNDERCOVER STUDENT** (Atria: S. & S. 2007. ISBN 978-0-7432-8366-3. pap. \$14), but the specter of the future looms over the author, posing as a senior at a California high school. An interesting blend of autobiography and tell-all, Iversen's tale is personal, emotional, and well written—and gives some real-life clues about the steps toward college and beyond.

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#### Author Information

Neal Wyatt compiles LJ's online feature *Wyatt's World* and is the author of *The Readers' Advisory Guide to Nonfiction* (ALA Editions, 2007). She is a collection development and readers' advisory librarian from Virginia. Those interested in contributing to *The Reader's Shelf* should contact her directly at [Readers\\_Shelf@comcast.net](mailto:Readers_Shelf@comcast.net)

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#### Acknowledgements

This column was contributed by **Gwen Glazer**, staff writer at Cornell University Library and MLIS student at Syracuse University, NY



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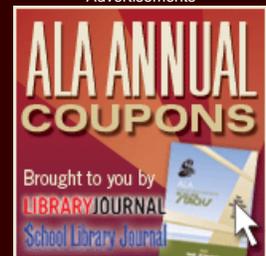


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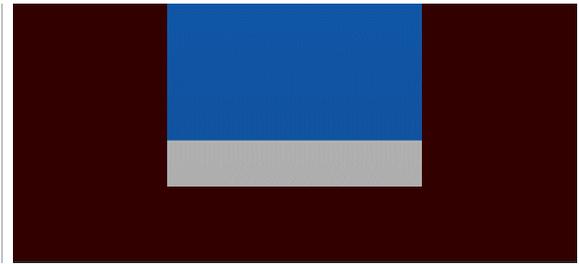
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